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SUBJECT: U.S. AND EU FIND COMMON GROUND IN ANNUAL
HUMANITARIAN DIALOGUE

¶1. (U) The U.S. and the European Union (EU) held their annual Strategic Dialogue on humanitarian issues May 3 in Brussels, discussing common concerns and programming in Africa and Asia, as well as thematic issues including the United Nations humanitarian reform process, protection of international humanitarian space, and whether to put the U.S. and EU "brand" name on items distributed in humanitarian crises worldwide. The U.S. was represented by a team from the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), led by A/S Ellen Sauerbrey, and a team from USAID's Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) office, led by Assistant Administrator Michael Hess. Antonio Cavaco, Director General of the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), hosted the day-long consultations.

Iraq

¶2. (U) Providing assistance to Iraqi refugees, most of whom fled to Jordan and Syria, has proven challenging for both PRM and ECHO, because refugees live on their own or with host families rather than in easily identifiable camps. A/S Sauerbrey said there are 14,000 Iraqi refugee children in school out of a total Iraqi refugee school-aged population of 200,000, as estimated by NGOs. UNHCR operates in Syria and the U.S. has given most of its assistance through UNHCR. Jordan, however, has resisted creating parallel services for refugees and asks that donors give money through the Jordanian ministries of health and education. ECHO faces regulatory constraints that prohibit it from giving money directly through government ministries because of the difficulty of tracking and monitoring funds that go into a common pool that provides services to both refugee and non-refugee populations. ECHO has earmarked 6.2 million euros to assist refugees in Jordan and Syria. A/S Sauerbrey said the U.S. this year will give \$20 million to NGOs, \$12 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and will fund 30 percent of UNHCR's appeals for Jordan and Syria. She also noted that resettlement to the United States will be a small but important solution for the most vulnerable refugees and for those to whom the U.S. has a moral commitment because of their work with the USG. She said there is no cap on the number of Iraqi refugees who may ultimately be resettled in the U.S.

13. (U) Similar difficulties face both ECHO and USAID in helping Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within Iraq. UNHCR does not operate within Iraq, nor do most NGOs and international organizations, and the IDPs live with host families rather than in camps. ECHO plans to give 4 million euros this year, all to ICRC. USAID's funding has increased from \$7 million last year to \$63 million this year, but finding additional partners has been challenging. "We have the money," Hess said. "But we need partners and capacity." He said the oft-cited figure of 2 million IDPs is much higher than the Iraqi Red Crescent's estimate of 600,000-700,000.

Africa: Sudan

14. (U) ECHO, PRM, and DCHA shared similar concerns about conditions in Darfur, including direct attacks on humanitarian workers as well as civilians, bureaucratic hurdles imposed by the Government of Sudan, little visible sign of implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, and a continued spreading of the crisis to neighboring Chad and Central African Republic. In Southern Sudan, ECHO noted that the return process has been challenging and that donor coordination could be better. ECHO opened an office in Juba in late April. Greg Gottlieb, Deputy Director of OFDA, said some programs, including health, are moving from humanitarian assistance to development assistance. Cees Wittebrood, ECHO Head of Unit for Africa, said ECHO has replaced general food distribution with targeted food-for-work and food-for-education exchanges.

Horn of Africa - Somalia and Kenya

15. (U) Both the DCHA and ECHO noted the difficulty of serving an estimated 300,000-400,000 IDPs in Somalia given the

challenges of security and humanitarian access. ECHO questioned the political wisdom of the EU and the U.S. backing the TFG, given its inability to protect the humanitarian space as well as other weaknesses. ECHO said that it has not supported UN programs in Somalia extensively because of a perceived lack of productivity, but Hess encouraged ECHO to look again, praising the current UN leadership and its plan for Somalia. On Kenya, A/S Sauerbrey noted that some 3,000 Somalis have gotten across an officially closed border into the Dadaab refugee camp. Wittebrood said ECHO was ready to close its Kenya operations a year ago, but the flows of Somali refugees coupled with flooding in Dadaab have caused ECHO to keep its programs in place.

Zimbabwe

16. (U) The former breadbasket of southern Africa is expected to fall about 50 percent short of its food needs this year, participants said. The EU and U.S. had similar estimates of the need, with ECHO estimating 700,000 tons of food, and DCHA estimating 600,000 tons. Hess attributed the pending shortfall to rising prices, lack of production (exacerbated by labor lost to HIV/AIDS), and crops being diverted to ethanol production. Wittebrood said the EU recently voted to extend humanitarian assistance to the Zimbabwean people and tighten sanctions on government officials.

Great Lakes

17. (U) A/S Sauerbrey said PRM is pleased with the pace of repatriation from Burundi, but had hoped to see more refugees return from Uganda and Rwanda to the DRC by now. PRM, she said, is particularly concerned about the Tanzanian government's expulsion of Burundian and Rwandan migrants, and will continue to work with the Tanzanian government to end that practice. ECHO DRC Desk Officer Philippe Maughan said ECHO is transitioning many of its programs to the development portfolio and has already handed over three-fourths of its health programs to the European Commission's Directorate General for Development.

Getting the EU and U.S. brand name out

¶8. (SBU) ECHO raised the difficulty it is having with ICRC refusing to allow ECHO to put its name and logo on ECHO-funded items it delivers. Simon Horner, ECHO's head of public relations, said European taxpayers should see what their tax money is buying. A/S Sauerbrey noted that PRM does not brand its items, but Hess said USAID puts its name and logo on almost everything. Exceptions have been made in Iraq, Lebanon, and other places where it was deemed counterproductive to have the U.S. name on goods, he said. USAID does not use ICRC to distribute goods, except in very difficult situations, so branding has not been an issue, Hess said. Gottlieb said that ICRC should be seen differently from many other humanitarian partners because of its unique role in accessing detainees and enforcing the Geneva convention.

Joint missions

¶9. (U) Based on the success of this year's trip to the DRC, as well as previous joint ventures, both PRM and ECHO enthusiastically agreed to continue conducting joint assessment field missions in humanitarian areas of common interest. Several potential locales were discussed for the next mission, and the three with the most widespread support were Burma/Thailand, Nepal/Bhutan, and Eastern Chad.

UN Humanitarian Reform

¶10. (U) PRM, DCHA, and ECHO expressed support for the Cluster approach, saying it improves coordination. All sides noted the effectiveness of each cluster is highly dependent on the personality of its leader, and that the concept has had some growing pains since it was implemented in many countries simultaneously instead of only in pilot countries as

originally envisioned.

Humanitarian Space: Civil Protection concerns

¶11. (U) Johannes Luchner, ECHO's Head of Unit for policy affairs, raised ECHO's serious concern about the image put forth by the numerous civil protection workers (fire, police, rescue, etc.) from EU member states who often assist in humanitarian disasters. He fears they are politicizing humanitarian assistance because they often have military backgrounds, wear uniforms, and are seen as agents of the state. Gottlieb said the U.S. does not face the same issue since it does not have a national civil protection force. The U.S. local civil protection workers who assist in international emergencies do not wear uniforms and operate under civilian humanitarian leadership, he said.

Humanitarian Space: Afghanistan

¶12. (U) Esko Kentrschynskyj, ECHO's Head of Unit for Asia, described the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan as grim, with 3.4 million Afghans without sufficient food security and a third of the population suffering from chronic malnutrition. One quarter of the population of Kabul, which has grown from 1 million to 4 million people since the start of the war, lives on less than \$1 a day, he said. A/S Sauerbrey expressed concern over the fate of 225,000 refugees who will be affected by planned camp closures, and expressed optimism that a scheduled conference on land distribution in the fall could help address some of the key issues facing returning refugees. ECHO officials said they are very concerned about the lack of coordination between the international civilian workers and military forces on the PRTs. Kentrschynskyj said the PRTs often give political strategies priority over development assistance. Because of the integrated nature of the mission, humanitarian coordination is not working well and is often subsumed by military policy, he said. Hess encouraged ECHO to look at the military not as a hindrance, but as a fact of life that is larger and more well-funded and equipped than the humanitarian community. "We have to work with the military

in combat situations because they are in control. We can ignore them or engage them, but we ignore them at our peril," he said.

Humanitarian Space: Sri Lanka

¶13. (U) Kentrschynskyj said the Government of Sri Lanka seems immune to pleas from the international community to halt violations of human rights and humanitarian law. Hess noted that the international actors on the ground try to coordinate their messages but wonder if anyone is really listening. Dawn Adie-Baird, ECHO Desk Officer for Sri Lanka, had a somewhat more hopeful view, saying she believed the Government of Sri Lanka was more susceptible to pressure from the international community than it was willing to acknowledge. The issue will be discussed further at an international meeting in November on civil-military issues under the Oslo Accords.

Asia: Bhutan

¶14. (U) A/S Sauerbrey said the USG expects to begin processing Bhutanese refugees in Nepal within two months for permanent resettlement to the United States. The announced figure of 60,000 is not a cap, she said. The USG would like to see some of the refugees return to Bhutan, but the Government of Bhutan has steadfastly refused, and the U.S. has no leverage to encourage a change in policy, she said. Sauerbrey asked for ECHO's assistance in providing additional food aid and in reconstructing a damaged causeway. Kentrschynskyj said ECHO would not be able to assist with the causeway, but is considering additional food assistance and has been pleased with the performance of the WFP.

Asia: Burma

¶15. (U) Kentrschynskyj said the situation of Burmese refugees in Thailand is more complex than that of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Each time a refugee camp in Thailand clears out because of resettlement to the U.S., it quickly fills up again, though the newcomers are more likely illegal migrants than new refugees, he said. He noted that ECHO would like to diversify its partners beyond the TBBC, which is currently ECHO's largest NGO partner in the world. A/S Sauerbrey noted concerns about conditions for refugees, in particular one detention center that was so crowded that occupants couldn't lie down. Both PRM and ECHO expressed concern about Hmong refugees from Laos that Thailand continually threatens to expel.

Conclusion

¶16. (U) The annual strategic dialogues are useful for the parties to meet face-to-face to discuss approaches and understand nuances in policy where they exist. PRM, USAID and DG ECHO are well aligned in our respective approaches to humanitarian assistance, and see additional opportunities for future cooperation.

¶17. (U) A/S Sauerbrey and A/A Hess have cleared on this report.

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